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ABSTRACT

Experience has shown repeatedly that many members of the "recovering community" are very interested and committed to helping to prevent others from developing alcohol or other drug problems or in helping those who currently have these problems. However, it is often not evident how members of the "recovering community" can be most helpful on campus and work cooperatively with others interested in reducing alcohol and other drug problems. A program "Recovering Person's Prevention Project" (R3P) which involves recovering students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members in campus alcohol and other drug programming is described. The R3P provides an opportunity for recovering chemically dependent individuals to support each other and to share their experiences with interested groups and individuals on and off campus. Members: (1) meet at least twice monthly for projects, brainstorming ideas, coordinating programs, and providing support; (2) serve as liaisons to and provide support to the 12-step groups on campus and in the community; (3) coordinate R3P activities with other campus and community alcohol and other drug programs; (4) convene the Alcohol Education Discipline Program groups to serve students; (5) provide panel presentations to campus and community groups; (6) provide some staffing for the Alcohol and Other Drug Education Program at the campus Wellness Resource Center; and (7) provide activities for Alcohol Awareness Month, including participating in the homecoming parade and an awareness day. (Program highlights from the 1990-92 academic years are listed.) (ABL)

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The Recovering Person's Prevention Project (R3P): Involving Recovering Students and Community Members in Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Prevention on the College Campus

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Introduction

It is very well documented that for many college students alcohol abuse and other drug use is a problem (Elgen, 1991; Johnston, Bachman & O'Malley, 1992; Wechsler & Isaac, 1991). Research by the previously cited authors and others indicates that many college students experience a vast array of negative consequences from their use of alcohol (e.g. alcohol overdose, injury, unplanned or unprotected sexual relationships, impaired academic performance, automobile or boat crashes) and some students use drugs other than alcohol. In addition, thirteen percent of all adults will meet diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence at some time in their lives (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). At any given time on our campuses a significant, though unknown, number of students, faculty, staff and administrators are likely to be involved in some sort of a recovery program for alcoholism or other substance use problems.

Our collective experience has shown repeatedly that many members of the "recovering community," both on and off campus, are very interested and committed to helping prevent others from developing alcohol or other drug problems or in helping those who currently have these problems. However, it is often not evident how members of the "recovering community" can be most helpful on campus and work cooperatively with others interested in reducing alcohol and other drug problems. (See Rapaport & Norton, 1992, for a discussion of the importance of working cooperatively in this area.)

Many traditional and non-traditionally aged students are entering or returning to college already involved in some kind of recovery program. Even though specific data is not available, many students are involved in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA), other recovery programs or have

stopped using alcohol or other drugs on their own. Many of these students are extremely talented, well organized, have broad work and non-work experience and want to become involved in helping others while in college. Similarly, there are many faculty, staff, administrators and community members in recovery who want to help college students and are not as active in this work as they could be due to uncertainty about how to negotiate the college political environment, not feeling welcome or not knowing how best to undertake this work.

The purpose of this article is to describe a program titled the "Recovering Person's Prevention Project" (R3P) which involves recovering students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members in campus alcohol and other drug programming. The following issues will be discussed: Program philosophy and goals, staff and funding, panel presentations, and other activities.

Philosophy and Goals

The R3P provides an opportunity for recovering chemically dependent individuals to support each other and share their experiences with interested groups and individuals on and off campus. R3P members are available to talk with individuals or groups about alcohol and other drugs or other problems and make referrals to the proper resources when necessary. R3P's primary goal is to share the problems, strengths and hopes of its members with others, demonstrating that recovery is possible for all. The underlying values of openness and inclusiveness help to create an inviting and welcoming environment for individuals who want to become involved in the project.

R3P members:

- Meet at least twice monthly for projects, brainstorming ideas, coordinating

programs and providing support.

- Serve as liaisons to and provide support to the 12-step groups on campus and in the community.
- Coordinate R3P activities with other campus and community alcohol and other drug programs.
- Convene the Alcohol Education Discipline Program groups to serve students.
- Provide panel presentations to campus and community groups.
- Provide some staffing for the Alcohol and Other Drug Education Program at the campus Wellness Resource Center.
- Provide activities for Alcohol Awareness Month including participating in the homecoming parade, and an awareness day.

Staffing and Funding

The R3P is coordinated by one of the authors (Reyes) who reports to the manager of the university's Health Advocacy Services (Minelli) who in turn reports to the director of the Health Services. Secretarial support is provided during the academic year by a half-time secretary. Temporary university and federal grant funds were used as seed money to initially fund a pilot of this program. Currently the R3P is funded contractually through Mid-State Substance Abuse Commission, a state coordinating agency for the dissemination of state substance abuse prevention and treatment dollars. During the 1991-92 academic year there were approximately 60 members of R3P, about 30 of whom were active.

Panel Presentations

An extremely well received component of the R3P program are member panel presentations to specific groups. Panel members are carefully selected by the program

coordinator based upon the purpose of the presentation. For example, when speaking to a sorority a panel of chemically dependent people may include women who have been sexually assaulted; a panel of chemically dependent people who have been misdiagnosed by mental health professionals may be used when speaking to a counseling class; recovering student athletes may be used as part of a panel for a mandatory drug education class for student athletes; older returning chemically dependent people who flunked out of college due to alcohol or other drug problems may speak at a mandatory student discipline program.

When a group requests a visit by an R3P panel, the coordinator chooses volunteers to speak to the group. Panel members' experiences are matched to the needs of the audience. The panel is briefed on the needs of the group and the amount of time available for their presentation. The R3P presentation is an open and revealing look at the lives of the recovering participants. Panel members discuss their lives before recovery, explain how they reached the decision to get help, and tell about the recovery process. After the presentation, the floor is open to questions and discussion, and panel members and the audience interact and share feelings.

Recovering people bring energy, enthusiasm and experience to programs and workshops about alcohol and other drug use problems. They provide more than textbook information about the problems and symptoms of dependency on alcohol and other drugs; they understand and communicate to others the realities of alcohol and other drug problems. Panels have been guests in classrooms, residence halls and treatment centers, at organization, fraternity and sorority meetings, and at other interested groups on or off campus.

The program has proven to be a very rewarding and educational experience for both the panel and the audience. Evaluations following each presentation repeatedly show that R3P members have had a significant impact on the audiences as they share their stories. Most attendees say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the presentations, learned some new information and to some extent, thought about or evaluated their own alcohol or other drug use. Some representative attendee comments include the following: "I have never heard recovering alcoholics speak, and it really made me aware of issues I never thought of before." "It helped me better understand compulsive behaviors in a personal, non-judgmental fashion." "Your own personal experiences added a dimension of realism to a topic that in a university setting is often only covered from an academic point of view." "I appreciated the fact that you attempted to tailor panels to meet the needs of the target group you were presenting to.". "I liked the honest responses of the panel. Their presentation really made me re-evaluate myself."

R3P Highlights from 1990-92

In order to understand the breadth of involvement on and off campus by R3P members, program highlights for two academic years are summarized below:

1990-91 Academic Year

- Recovering people developed an original play titled, "Into Awareness" in which recovering students act in a series of short, humorous, yet realistic theater productions dealing with substance abuse issues.
- Weekly open AA meetings were held on campus during both fall and spring semesters with over 1,500 attendees.
- Twenty-six recovering person's panel presentations were made serving over 1,400

students and others.

- A recovering person co-led the Alcohol/Drug Free Support Group which greatly facilitated involvement in AA and NA for appropriate students.
- An "Addiction Has No Prejudice" float was built and exhibited by the R3P group during the homecoming parade. Over 2,000 pieces of literature were distributed to parade viewers.
- A rock band consisting of members from R3P provided entertainment for the kick-off of National Collegiate Drug Awareness Week.
- An R3P member participated in a debate with members of the Hemp Environmental Activists group attended by approximately 100 people.
- Members of R3P were invited as guest speakers for the Spring Greek Pledge Camp attended by 400 pledges. R3P was invited to return for next year's Pledge Camp.
- R3P spoke to the basketball team regarding alcohol abuse.

1991-92 Academic Year

- Approximately seventy panel presentations were made serving over 2,600 students and others. Panel presentations were given at two Greek Pledge Camps, in various residence halls, in classes, for other student organization meetings, at community forums, in area high schools and junior high schools, other off campus sites, and for the mandatory Alcohol Education Discipline Program.
- The program coordinator spent much time talking with hundreds of walk-ins and referrals regarding issues and problems about substance abuse.
- During Alcohol Awareness Month R3P sponsored a "Pool and Dance Party" at

the Student Activity Center. Over 100 students participated in this alcohol-free alternative activity. A disc jockey was on hand for the dancing and a mocktail bar was available for everyone's enjoyment.

- The "Into Awareness" play was presented for three evenings during Alcohol Awareness Month.
- Also during Alcohol Awareness Month R3P developed a float for the homecoming parade. R3P wanted to communicate an alcohol and other drug abuse educational message through the float, knowing that thousands attend the parade. R3P members involved with the float wore alcohol education tee-shirts and handed out "Natural High" flyers and "We Care" candy suckers. The highlight of the event was coming in second place in the float contest.
- R3P sponsored tailgate parties for all the CMU home football games. Members gathered for an alcohol-free tailgate party outside the football stadium for a great time of barbecuing, spending time together, and displaying that a good time is possible without alcohol and other drugs. Group members wore alcohol education tee-shirts for the tailgate parties and to the games.
- During the fall semester several R3P members went to an alcohol and other drug workshop with the program coordinator. R3P members want to attend and participate in any available conferences or workshops which will equip and educate them further as they in turn seek to help others with addictions. The U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Antonio Novello was the keynote speaker at the workshop. A highlight for R3P members was to personally meet her and talk with her about the R3P program. She requested further information about our

group which was sent to her.

- The program coordinator spoke at an alcohol and other drug community forum and was assisted by a panel of R3P members.
- R3P staffed a booth to participate in the university's Minority Health Fair. R3P members took turns throughout the event to supervise the booth, answer questions, and hand out several different alcohol and other drug educational brochures, free key chains, and other items with an alcohol education message.
- R3P served as a bridge to twelve-step programs held on campus. Professors encouraged their students to attend open AA meetings for extra class credit. Residence assistants used the open AA meetings to refer students who demonstrated a need to examine their own alcohol usage. Approximately 1,000 people attended open AA meetings during the academic year. An on-campus co-dependency support group was also started and is showing signs of growth.
- The program coordinator met with the university's president and vice president for Student Affairs to inform them about the program and help them to have a better understanding of the support and programming R3P has to offer to CMU students and the community.
- At the conclusion of the 1991-92 academic year the program coordinator held an appreciation party for R3P members at her home. This was an opportunity to express thanks to all the volunteers. The university's president and his wife, vice president for Student Affairs, and the director of Mid-State Substance Abuse Commission were special guests. They helped honor R3P members by presenting framed certificates of appreciation.

- R3P received an "Outstanding Student Organization Award for Alcohol and Other Drug Awareness" from the Student Life office for the 1991-92 academic year. The program coordinator received a "Distinguished Service Award" for her contribution to the university community.

Conclusion

The Recovering Person's Prevention Project has evolved into an integral component of our campus efforts to reduce alcohol and other drug problems and promote healthy behaviors. It is a well accepted campus program. Through their involvement members benefit themselves and others.

Initially, as the program was being developed, all parties involved had to learn to trust one another. This is why the role of the program coordinator is essential and pivotal. The coordinator's character, enthusiasm and relentless networking at twelve-step meetings, residence halls, the student center cafeteria, wellness resource center, and her general availability results in the personal relationships which are the program's foundation. As is often the case, what is a strength can be a weakness if used to excess. Careful attention to setting limits and self-care have been necessary components of the program coordinator's and R3P volunteers' work. We look forward to the program's ongoing success and evolution.

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